President:
Tom Titmus
283-7453

Lafayette Historical Society
POST OFFICE BOX 133 LAFAYETTE, CALIF. 94549

NEWSLETTER

Lafayette, California | November, 1999 | Vol. 26, No. 3

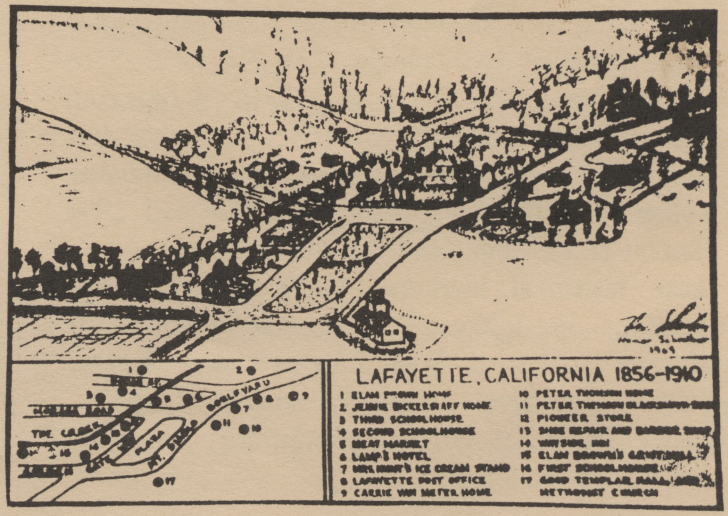
Local History is Alive in Lafayette Schools

You may be surprised to hear the bell at the Methodist Church ringing in the middle of a school day or see the children touring around the Lafayette cemetery in the morning. This is Lafayette history coming alive for the third grade children in the Lafayette School District.

This year there are about 400 children who will become acquainted with Peter Thompson, Jennie Bickerstaff, and Elam and Margaret Brown. They will discover where these notables lived, what they did, and why they were important in the beginnings of our city. Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation docents Emily Haas and Mary McCosker present three lessons to each third grade class in the district. Lesson one introduces students to Lafayette before the white man appeared up through the time of Elam Brown's arrival. They are shown slides of then and now. Lesson two is a mapping exercise (using the Lafayette Historical Society map) highlighting the sites of early Lafayette. Then the children make a slate similar to the ones used by children in our early schoolhouses and view artifacts from the pioneer period. The third lesson is a guided tour of both the downtown, pointing out historical building and sites, and the cemetery, visiting graves of some of the early pioneers, as well as doing rubbings of some graves using crayons and paper. These students become quite expert in knowing about the early days of Lafayette.

Emily and Mary are currently writing a book about Lafayette History for third graders which will be a classroom supplement for the history lessons.

We all owe Mary and Emily a vote of thanks for the wonderful work they do.



Named La Fayette

Bill Shurtleff has called to our attention an error in the date of naming Lafayette. As published in the recent Lafayette Business Directory and commonly accepted in LHS history, the date of 1855 is incorrect.

Bill has provided us with a letter from the Office of the Postmaster General indicating that the correct date is March 2, 1857. From a list of postmasters in Contra Costa County and their appointment dates, the Lafayette Post Office was established as La Fayette on the above date and was changed to Lafayette on March 1, 1932.

From a copy of the handwritten list of postmasters, Benjamin Shreve was listed as postmaster of La Fayette appointed on the above date. The letter further states, "According to *History of California Post Offices 1849-1976* by Harold Salley, this post office was named for Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, a French statesman and officer in the American Army during the Revolutionary War."

We are grateful to Bill for providing this information.

RR Signs Vandalized Again and Again and Again

Once again we have repaired two railroad signs along the Lafayette/Moraga Trail which have been damaged by vandals. The Regional Park District has joined forces with LHS in repairing and replacing damaged signs. If you notice vandals destroying these signs, please notify Lafayette Police. If you notice damage, please call Ollie Hamlin at 283-6822 and we will make repairs on these historical markers. There are five sign locations in Lafayette: Lafayette Station off Moraga Boulevard, West Lafayette near Stanley School (the most frequently vandalized sign), Reliez Station at Olympic Boulevard., Glenside, and Burton Valley.

History Center - Further Information

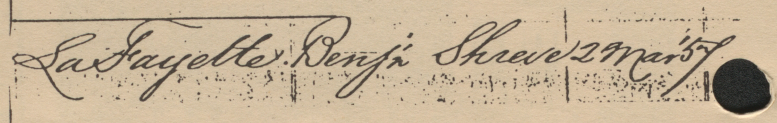
In spite of an impending move to new quarters, the History Center of the Contra Costa Historical Society remains open and welcomes researchers. Volunteers are ready to help you locate information about Lafayette, its history and its people. Andrew Young, one-time resident of Lafayette, has recently completed *The History Helper*, which will facilitate your efforts to find the sources you seek.

For information about Lafayette people, consult the biography and obituary files. Old assessors records, court cases, and registrars of voters are invaluable. Consult the cemetery records which may indicate where the people lived. This is especially helpful in the case of those who settled before cities were incorporated and early residents who owned property throughout the county. Don't forget to view family pictures in the extensive photo department.

Further information in file boxes is devoted to Lafayette. Headings of folders include such topics as Buckeye Ranch, Disasters, Fire Department, Horse Show, Library, Reservoir, and Receipts (from businesses). Some of the rarest material about Lafayette and its people is available in boxes devoted to the work of individuals. These include Sandy Kimball, author of *La Fayette - A Pictorial History*, Dorothy Mutnick, who wrote two volumes on local history, and Les Sipes, photographer for the Oakland Tribune. Another source is the Lafayette Sun from 1957-1968.

These are but samples of the types of treasures in the History Center which is located at 1700 Oak Park Blvd., Pleasant Hill, Room C-5.

Above information provided by Ruth Dyer, Recording Secretary for LHS.



Renaming Plaza Park to Elam Brown Plaza

At the LHS Annual Meeting last May, members voted to rename Plaza Park to Elam Brown Plaza. This was in honor of Elam Brown, donor of the property, who is credited as being the founder of what was to become Lafayette. This action was conveyed to the City Council which, at a regular meeting of the Council, voted to rename the park to Elam Brown Plaza.

Plans to Renovate Elam Brown Plaza

City Planners, with the assistance of the LHS, have spent a great deal of time in planning the revamping of our little downtown park, Elam Brown Plaza, and the surrounding area into a larger park and a more attractive "Heart of Lafayette." The planning includes improving downtown traffic circulation and parking as well as sprucing up the downtown area to be consistent with other improvements in the shopping area.

The plan for the plaza area was shown and approved at the LHS Annual Meeting in May. The plan is on display in the LHS display case on the west side of the Lafayette Lucky Store. The plan was approved by the City Council and was put out to bid in September. Unfortunately, the one bid received was for a cost greater than the funds available. The plan is now being revised and will be put out to bid again in November.

Restoration of the historic buildings on Plaza Way has been a goal of LHS for many years. A small fund (about $12,000) known as the Fern Davis Fund, is dedicated to this project. Obviously, more money (and approval and participation of the property owners) will be needed to undertake the project. A fund raising drive for this purpose is being considered.

Library/Historical Museum Complex?

The LHS has been trying for many years to find a permanent home for historical papers and artifacts which would be available to the public. We have a small temporary storage space in the EDC Systems building on Golden Gate Way. This space has been provided through the courtesy of owner Efi Lubliner. However, access is limited and not available to the public.

The high cost of land and building and maintenance cost for a permanent museum is probably well beyond our capability. However, by joining forces with Friends of the Library, the Lafayette School Board and the City, prospects for a combined library and museum are greatly improved. Marechal Duncan, Chair of Community Relations, represents LHS on the Lafayette Library Vision 2000 task force which is working for a new, expanded library for Lafayette. After many meetings and visits to other libraries in the area, the task force submitted its recommendations at a joint City Council and Lafayette School Board town meeting on 12 October 1999. The recommendations, with minor changes, were approved and the City will proceed with further planning.

Your LHS Board has proposed that the Society support and assist in a fund-raising drive for the new library with an area dedicated to the display and storage of our historical records and artifacts.

We are grateful to Marechal for his hard work on our behalf in this important matter.

Have You Paid Your 1999 LHS Dues?

If the label on your newsletter bears an X mark, the records indicate that you have not yet paid your 1999 LHS dues. Your check for $10 may be sent to: Lafayette Historical Society, P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, CA 94549.

Old Betsy May Be Younger Than We Thought

George Wasson, keeper of Old Betsy, Lafayette's vintage fire engine, has stated her birth date as 1919, sometimes 1917. In a letter from Lee Volquardsen, who did much of the restoration of the mechanical workings of Old Betsy, casts considerable doubt on those dates. Following is a letter to George from Lee outlining his research in this matter.

"You have asked me to tell you Betsy's birth date and my answer is absolutely maybe. As we are both aware, ladies do not like to have their age discussed either privately or publicly and they take great pride in updating their wardrobe and use many types of cosmetics to perpetuate their youthful appearance. Betsy, I believe, is no exception. Vintners take great pride in telling people of the vintage of their fine wines but the only time I have ever heard Betsy whine was when she was mistreated.

"Firstly, Betsy is not a Ford Model T but rather is a Ford Model TT. King Henry, and don't call him Hank, gave the TT designation to his trucks of that era. Henry insisted on interchangeability of parts for his creations and, although the TT was a larger and stronger vehicle than the T, many parts from many years of production were interchangeable.

"Secondly, Henry did not build a fire engine body during Betsy's time. He was kind enough (greedy enough?) to sell you a Ford TT chassis, allowing you to go to your local carpenter, cabinet maker or your woodshed to put on his beautiful chassis any darn thing that pleased you. Another maybe problem.

"Now let's talk about some positives. Betsy's engine serial number is 4,260,318, which is equivalent to today's VIN designation. From Ford Archives this engine was built on August 11, 1920. It was one of 2,585 engines produced that day to be used in either a T or TT. The 1921 model year started on August 1, 1920 and ran to August 1, 1921. So if this is Betsy's original engine, one vote for a 1921 model.

"Starting with the 1921 model year, Henry changed the steering wheel from 15 to 16 inches outside diameter. Betsy's steering wheel is 16 inches. The steering wheel spider for 1921 was changed from a casting to a pressed steel unit; Betsy's is a pressed steel unit. Two more votes for a 1921 model.

"An oval gas tank replaced the round tank late in the 1920 model year and continued through the rest of the T/TT production. Betsy's tank is oval; a split 1920/19-- vote.

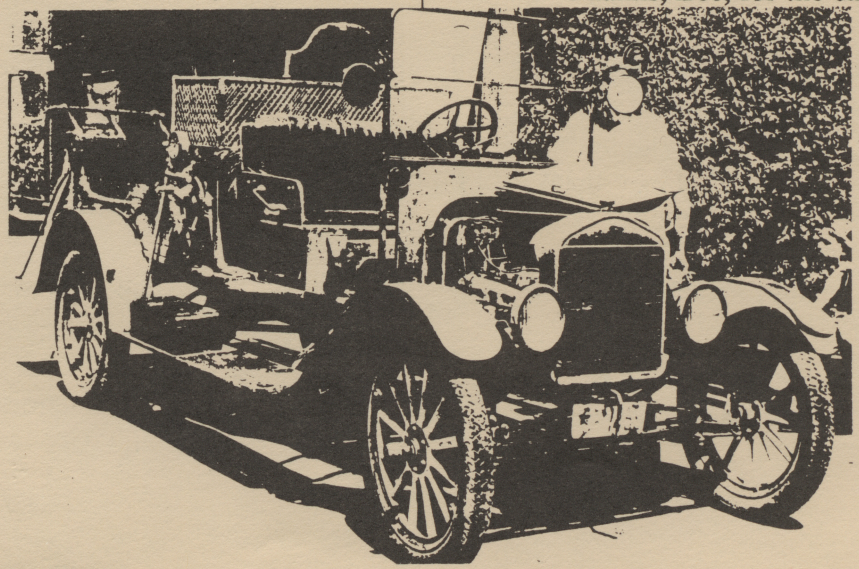
"There are a number of other distinguishing features that point to a 1921 model: hood handles of pressed steel rather than cast steel, pressed steel running board brackets, spring clamps, etc.

"But and maybe are still present and, although I have not been to Reno lately, I think I would put a penny on a 1921 model. Would carbon dating or wood ring counting help? Naaah!

"What do you think and/or guess?

"Best regards, Lee Volquardsen."

Thanks, Lee, for the enlightenment (?).



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Publicity, Janice Crosetti Titmus	299-2030
Schools, Mary McCosker	284-5376
Walking Tours, Bill Wakeman	283-3908
Mary McCosker	284-5376
Landmarks, Ray Peters	283-5256

More on 1999 LHS Dues

We value your membership in the Society. However, if you are really not interested in continuing your membership, please let us know. This will save us printing and postage costs. If you have not already done so, we do hope you will continue your membership by paying your 1999 LHS dues.

LHS Mission Statement

"We believe in the power of history to ignite the imagination, stimulate thought, and provide enjoyment. Through our collections and programs we strive to link Lafayette's history to the lives of people"

Lafayette Historical Society **Membership Application**

Name:_____ Spouse:_____

Address:_____ City, State,Zip_____

Home Phone:_____

Membership Category and Dues:

_____Student $2.50

_____Family $10.00

_____Business $50.00

_____Life Member $100.00

Areas of Special Interest:

____Annual Dinner ____Archives
____Displays ____Fire Engine
____LHS Online ____Landmarks
____Newspaper Clip. ____Oral History
____Photographs ____Programs
____Research ____Telephone
Other_____

Dues_____ Fire Engine Restoration_____ Building Fund_____ TOTAL_____

Please make check to: Lafayette Historical Society, P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, CA 94549

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